

HOUSE BILL 2720

By Love

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 15,
Chapter 2, relative to Historically Black Colleges
and Universities.

WHEREAS, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have played and continue to play a pivotal role in enhancing the overall socioeconomic status of African-American communities, as well as the fabric of our nation; and

WHEREAS, Historically Black Colleges and Universities are institutions of higher learning established prior to 1964, with the primary mission of educating African Americans. Although these institutions were created primarily to educate African-American students, these institutions offer all students, regardless of race, an inclusive and welcoming environment to pursue their scholastic endeavors; and

WHEREAS, HBCUs have been essential to the African-American and American community since their inception; and

WHEREAS, the Institute for Colored Youth, now Cheyney University, the oldest HBCU, was established in 1837 in Pennsylvania, and all others that have followed have made significant contributions to American society; and

WHEREAS, Tennessee is home to seven HBCU institutions: American Baptist College, Fisk University, Knoxville College, Lane College, LeMoyne Owen College, Meharry Medical College, and Tennessee State University, with at least one HBCU in each of the state's Grand Divisions; and

WHEREAS, the four HBCUs in Nashville have produced notable graduates that played a major role in the Civil Rights Movement in Nashville such as: Ida B. Wells, John Lewis, John Hope Franklin, and W.E.B. Dubois at Fisk University; Arikana Quao and Grace Marilynn James

at Meharry Medical College; Oprah Winfrey and James Clayborne, Jr., at Tennessee State University; and C. T. Vivian, Bernard Lafayette, and James Bevel at American Baptist College; and

WHEREAS, the three Historically Black Colleges and Universities outside of Middle Tennessee have produced exceptional graduates as well, including former Speaker Pro Tempore of the Tennessee House of Representatives Lois Marie DeBerry from LeMoyne-Owen College; civil rights attorney Donald Lee Hollowell from Lane College; and journalist Vernon Daurice Jarrett from Knoxville College; and

WHEREAS, Nashville has always led the way in the fight for equality and civil rights in government and many other aspects of life. The city's HBCU students were able to evoke change through their participation in sit-ins and marches, and were able to impact better race relations for years to come; and

WHEREAS, HBCUs are representative of only three percent of the country's higher learning institutions, yet they produce almost twenty percent of all African-American graduates; and

WHEREAS, HBCUs also address the disparity of African-American graduates in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) field. HBCUs produce twenty five percent of African-American graduates with degrees in STEM; and

WHEREAS, HBCUs impact communities throughout the nation, by generating \$14.8 billion in economic impact in addition to 134,090 jobs for their communities; and

WHEREAS, Historically Black Colleges and Universities provide students with intimate learning settings, a challenging academic environment, memorable social experiences, as well as the opportunity to create a legacy; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 15, Chapter 2, is amended by adding the following as a new section:

March 12 of each year is to be observed as "Historically Black Colleges and Universities Day." This day is not a legal holiday as defined in § 15-1-101.

SECTION 2. This act takes effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.